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AUTHOR Westbrook, Franklin D.; Sedlacek, William E.
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ABSTRACT

In recent years thousands of minority persons who were previously denied access to primarily white, U.S. institutions of higher education have enrolled in them. Many institutions initiated special programs designed to compensate for academic skill problems observed in some of these new students. The effect of these programs on student retention is an important area of concern, but in the 1980s some researchers have avoided the special program issue by demonstrating that one can identify, through a set of noncognitive variables, which minority students are likely to remain in college through graduation. Some of these variables, such as positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal and the ability to delay gratification, have been recognized for a long time. Others, such as understanding and dealing with racism, and preference for long-term over short-term goals also have important academic consequences. A workshop has been developed to train counselors, advisors, teachers, and other personnel in higher education to make diagnostic referrals for minority students using noncognitive variables. Workshop participants review case materials and do simulated interviews. They are given information on interviewing and identifying student behaviors associated with each noncognitive variable. Results from participants' evaluations indicated that they understood the noncognitive variables and could identify them from written materials and interviews. (ABL)

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Workshop on Using Non-Cognitive Variables With Minority Students in Higher Education

Research Report # 4-87

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Workshop on Using Non-Cognitive Variables With

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Summary

A workshop designed to train counselors, advisors, teachers, and other personnel in higher education to make diagnostic referrals for minority students with problems is presented and discussed. The workshop is sponsored by the Association of American Medical Colleges with federal funding but is designed for professionals in all areas of higher education. The workshop concentrates on developing participant skills in using a set of noncognitive variables developed by Sedlacek and Brooks 1976 and further refined by Tracey and Sedlacek (1984, 1985, 1987). Participants review case materials and do simulated interviews. They are also given information on interviewing and identifying student behaviors associated with each noncognitive variable. Participants evaluate the workshop on its effectiveness.

Workshop on Using Non-Cognitive Variables with Minority Students in Higher Education

In recent years, thousands of minority persons who were previously denied access to primarily White, American institutions of higher education have been enrolled in them. To accommodate these new students, many public and private institutions initiated special programs that were designed to compensate for academic skill problems observed in some of the students, but according to Gordon (1975) they often differed both in practice and depth of commitment to the clientele they sought to serve.

Gordon (1975) was further concerned about the speed and care given to the planning of evaluations of the programs. One of the most important areas of concern is retention rate; that is, the success of a program in helping a substantial number of students remain in school and ultimately obtain a degree.

Tinto and Sherman (1974) and Rossman and Astin (1975) agreed that proof of the value of special programs can be demonstrated only by showing that they contribute to the retention of minority students, but Tracey and Sedlacek (1984, 1985, & 1987) avoided the special program issue and demonstrated that one can identify, through a set of non-cognitive variables, which minority students are likely to remain in college to graduation regardless of the educational program they experience. They present evidence that the non-cognitive variables identify minority students who have a high probability of succeeding in college despite often having low standardized test scores. The non-cognitive variables identify characteristics in minority students which signal development which would probably have been reflected in significantly

higher standardized test scores had their educational opportunities been equal to those of majority students. Data suggest that this typically unassessed development is a continuing asset for minority students who have it, and a continuing problem for those who do not (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984, 1985, & 1987).

Some of the non-cognitive variables (e.g., self concept, realistic self appraisal, and the ability to delay gratification) have, for a long time, been accepted as being essential to good emotional and academic development (see Table 1). Understanding and dealing with racism has surfaced in other studies under the more generalized name of negotiating the university system (Westbrook & Smith, 1976, and Westbrook Miyares & Roberts, 1978). Low self concept, low self knowledge, low demonstrated ability to understand and deal with racism, and a low ability to delay gratification are directly counter to academic proficiency.

With the exception of "demonstrated medical interests," which can be generalized to interest in any occupation, the remaining non-cognitive variables (see Table 1) are less often discussed as having academic performance consequences, but they do have such consequences. Students who have severe enough problems in these areas spend so much time coping with the problems suggested by the areas in which they are low, that they fail to do their academic tasks, i.e., they put off (procrastinate) doing their academic work while they attempt to cope with their personal problems.

A workshop has been developed by the writers which is designed to train counselors, advisors, educators, and personnel workers to employ the variables shown in Table 1 in their work with minority students. More specifically, the workshop is designed to train professionals to make a diagnosis as to which of

the noncognitive variables is the primary problem for a minority student who is in some personal or academic difficulty. Participants in the workship are expected to be able to understand the noncognitive variables, how the variables work with minority students, and how the participant can identify key noncognitive variables in written materials and interviews so that an appropriate referral for help with the students' problem can be made.

The workhsop is typically presented as a six to seven hour experience with a break for lunch or an overnight break. The workshop is sponsored by the Association of American Medical Colleges and is funded by the Health Careers Opportunity Program of the Health and Human Services Department of the Federal Government. While the cases are medical students, the content of the workshop is generalized and participants come from a variety of health and non-health settings. There is no charge to participants.

The workshop will be discussed in chronological phases.

Background Information Phase

The participants in the workshop are first acquainted with the noncognitive variables (NCV's) through the profile in Table 1. One of the workshop leaders goes through the column that is headed "High Score" and gives the workshop participants a brief introduction to the NCV's.

Because there is interest in teaching participants to identify behaviors and self statements they have already heard about, to think about and analyze them differently, and to develop a different set of conclusions, they are introduced to the characteristics of the NCV's in several different ways. The second exposure participants have to them is through consideration of how low scores on the variables look.

In the column headed "Low Score," one can get an idea of the kinds of information students give about themselves. The statements one sees in the column are not necessarily what students say directly, and participants must be trained to look for clues to each variable. The following section provides additional information about otherwise commonly understood NCV's which can be used to analyze behaviors of minority students.

Positive Self Concept or Confidence

Self concept is a term that is familiar to most helpers. There is no interest in this workshop in trying to be consistent with the definitions participants already use. We simply want them to add to their definition, if they do not already include it, the idea of confidence or belief in one's self, belief in one's capability to do what they have set out to do.

When participants become mentally prepared to listen for statements that reflect student feelings about their capabilities for graduating from the program in which they are matriculated, they are ready to assess the interviewees' self concept. Research shows that any minority student who admits to any possibility of his/her not graduating is less likely to graduate than one who refuses to accept that anything can prevent his/her graduating. The evidence the participant is expected to use to determine whether the student is confident or "whistling in the dark" is what the student says about his/her abilities, how he or she compares to other students who attend the same classes, what grades are expected, etc. A student who is positive and apparently analytic and realistic probably should be believed.

Realistic Self Appraisal

All students need to know how they stand in relation to the academic tasks that are before them. Some departments in many universities are defensive. In

order to restrict enrollments, they set entrance requirements above the actual intellectual demands of their department even though they know that almost anyone who is a diligent student can learn all the department would normally teach in given classes. Under the name of maintaining high standards, professors in some of these departments pile on enormous amounts of work, more than they would ever have time to either discuss or develop tests to evaluate. They reason that the most capable students will either already know much of the material or will manage to study a representative portion of what is put on the examinations.

Minority students who are unable to penetrate the informal communication system that goes on among students, faculty and staff are more likely to have difficulty determining what is important and what is not. Minority students who do not know how evaluation is done in the school, students who are not on the "past exam circuit," students who do not know how they are doing until grades come out, and students who do not know how they compare to the other students in their classes are at a disadvantage and had better be extremely bright and studious or they can expect to have trouble.

Understands and Deals with Racism

Any student who is in a system that he/she does not understand is at a disadvantage. Primarily White universities were, however, built for White students. They have been developed over several generations to respond to the needs that desirable White students present. A part of this development is a capacity to appear hospitable and willing to orient newcomers. This is often precisely what makes the institution racist (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976).

Historically, the institutions were built for White students, and it was advertised that Black students were not welcome (admitted) into them. Blacks

remember this and approach the "institutional hospitality suites" with reluctance, often not at all. Because of the history of institutions, they need to advertize their equal opportunity status and to respond appropriately to minority students who approach.

Students who are not sure how the "system" works, who are preoccupied with racism or who report ignorance of the existence of racism, who blame others for all of their problems, who react with the same intensity to all issues related to race, and who allow efforts to deal with racism to get in the way of the accomplishment of their academic goals need an immediate referral to someone who can help them rearrange their emotional and practical priorities and feel good about the results.

Prefers Long-Range Goals to Short-Term or Immediate Needs

School, in the United States, is one of the most constant activities in a persons' history of growing into an adult. As such, it is by its nature probably the most continuous model that youth get for anything, e.g., learning the importance of delaying gratification. One studies now for grades later; or completes a set of courses this year which will be added to the set completed last year and the sets that will be completed next year and the year afterwards in order to gain (the right-of-passage) a degree and the right to teach or practice law or accounting, etc. We live in a society in which either very little that is good comes or is retained without planning, which is the essence of delaying gratification.

Some authors say Blacks do not delay gratification very well (Mischel, 1958). However, if we apply Skinnerian principles we see that people delay gratification with reluctance when what they can get today looks more attractive than what they can get by waiting until sometime later, or when they have

no reliable data to suggest that they will get in the future what they work for today. For example, until roughly 20 years ago the right to vote in the U.S. was not universally applicable to Blacks. At least half of the Black population of the U.S. are at various stages of psychological recovery from the implication of that fact.

Students whose study habits and grades suggest a lack of goal setting and accomplishment, who are always busy but without a direction they can articulate, who appear to live too much for the present, who have vague and what appear to be unrealistic goals, etc., look as if they have problems with delayed gratification and can be referred for counseling in this area.

The remaining NCV's can be analyzed in essentially the same ways and it will become clear that they have academic performance consequences. In the workshop they are covered in sufficient detail to have the participants work with them efficiently in the next phase of the workshop.

In this phase of the workshop there is interest in helping counselors and advisors work with students who have been admitted to their institution with the assumption that they can do the work, but they are not doing it. Work with minority students suggests that they can be helped as conveniently by counseling and advising as other students can. However, because they probably feel more anxious than majority students when, because they are not achieving, they come to the notice of someone who appears to have authority over them, help given to them needs to take into account the negative effects of their marginal to failing performance. While majority students typically see the university system as belonging to them and existing for their support, minority students often see the situation in the opposite way and fear a reaction from the system to their failure to make maximum use of it.

Most students respond with reluctance to attempts at counseling by persons who have authority over them. Minority students are even more resistant because they have the additional fears regarding the history of the institution and the likelihood that it will deal unfairly with them. Minority students can, however, be encouraged to accept a referral, and the best referrals are those that are specific to some kind of presenting problem. The case descriptions reflect some of these issues.

Introduction to Case Material

In this phase of the workshop, the participants are separated into groups of five or six, and each member of the small groups is given three disguised case descriptions of minority students whose problems fit one of the NCV's. A total of eight case handouts are employed and assigned in different combinations to groups depending on the number of groups (see example in Table 2). This system assures that several participants are acquainted with each case.

The participants are instructed to study the three cases they have (during free time, usually half an hour) and then to reconvene in their small groups and reach consensus on the main NCV problem presented by the case writeup. They are given a period of time to reach consensus and are then recalled to the large group to participate in a general discussion of the cases. One of the workshop leaders records their decisions, monitors speaking turns and time taken by participants, and keeps discussion going across the groups at least long enough to get the correct answers. The leader also points out the information that different participants present that helps movement toward the correct responses.

Counseling Practice Phase

In the next phase of the workshop, participants practice interviewing students who present non-cognitive problems in an effort to ascertain with a high degree of confidence that they can identify the students' major problems, and refer them to someone who can work with the problems they present.

In this segment of the workshop, the leaders attempt to bolster the interviewing skills that participants already have by making recommendations about the organization and administration of the interview environment and ways of interacting with minority students in a referral interview.

One of the workshop leaders discusses with the participants (1) conditions that are conducive to good interviews; (2) the use of personnel records; (3) meeting the interviewee, establishing rapport, and beginning work; (4) isolating the problem without embarrassing the interviewee unnecessarily; (5) facing the facts professionally; (6) observing the interviewee's verbal and nonverbal behaviors; (7) alleviating the interviewee's shock or disillusionment; (8) establishing a reputation for being helpful and fair and for keeping confidences; (9) the giving of advice and information; (10) making sure that all relevant considerations are reviewed; (11) developing a list of alternatives and a plan of action; and (12) making the referral.

Characteristics of particular racial or ethnic groups which may affect the interview are discussed briefly. Participants are encouraged to pursue student behaviors or characteristics that they do not understand such as lack of eye contact or student discomfort with seating arrangements. The point is made that one cannot learn all the culturally and racially relevant behaviors for a group or groups in a workshop or perhaps even with unlimited time. Relevant

behaviors evolve, disappear and vary by region. Thus an overall approach to developing sensitivity to such behaviors is recommended.

The leaders attend to the fact that the person doing the referral interview may be the person who will ultimately do the counseling. It is emphasized, however, that the decision to remain with the counselor who is doing the referral interview should, whenever it is possible, be left to the student.

At the end of the above discussion, the participants are divided into dyads preparatory to doing two roleplays. The dyads decide who will be client and counselor first. The clients are given a case presentation of a real, disguised case as in Table 2. They are given a block of semi-free time during which they are to study the case sufficiently to be able to learn the substance of the problem as it is presented in the case, discover the NCV problem, and play the role for the counselor. The counselor's task is to interview the client, discover the problem, and help the client develop a tentative plan of action.

After the interview, the dyads are reconvened for a discussion of the case from the point of view of roleplayers and counselors. The leader helps them isolate the considerations that lead them to the correct decision. They are then given the last case and requested to change roles and follow the same process.

A discussion of the last case is followed by a paper and pencil evaluation given to participants. Results from evaluations of more than 400 participants in twelve workshops indicate that participants feel; they understand the NCV's (72%-93%), they can identify key NCV's from written material (63%-84%) and from live interviews (61%-81%).

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Handouts are made available to participants on characteristics of high and low NCV scorers (Table 1), interviewing tips, a vocational information bibliography, and information on learning more about the NCV's. Readers of this article are invited to write the senior author for copies of this information.

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Table 1

PROFILES OF HIGH AND LOW SCORERS ON NON-COGNITIVE VARIABLES

William E. Sedlacek

VARIABLE	HIGH SCORE	LOW SCORE
1. POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT OR CONFIDENCE	Feels confident of making it through graduation. Makes positive statements about him/herself. Expects to do well in academic and non-academic areas. Assumes he/she can handle new situations or challenges.	Can express reason(s) why he/she might have to leave school. Not sure he/she has ability to make it. Feels other students are better than he/she is. Expects to get marginal grades. Feels he/she will have trouble balancing personal and academic life. Avoids new challenges or situations.
2. REALISTIC SELF-APPRAISAL	Appreciates and accepts rewards as well as consequences of poor performance. Understands that reinforcement is imperfect, and does not overreact to positive or negative feedback. Has developed a system of using feedback to alter behavior.	Not sure how evaluations are done in school. Overreacts to most recent reinforcement (positive or negative), rather than seeing it in a larger context. Does not know how he/she is doing in classes until grades are out. Does not have a good idea of how peers would rate his/her performance.
3. UNDERSTANDS AND DEALS WITH RACISM	Understands the role of the "system" in his/her life and how it treats minority persons, often unintentionally. Has developed a method of assessing the cultural/racial demands of the system and responding accordingly: assertively, if the gain is worth it, passively if the gain is small or the situation is ambiguous. Does not blame others for his/her problems or appear as a "Pollyanna" who does not see racism.	Not sure how the "system" works. Preoccupied with racism or does not feel racism exists. Blames others for problems. Reacts with same intensity to large and small issues concerned with race. Does not have a method of successfully handling racism that does not interfere with personal and academic development.
4. PREFERS LONG-RANGE GOALS TO SHORT-TERM OR IMMEDIATE NEEDS	Can set goals and proceed for some time without reinforcement. Shows patience. Can see partial fulfillment of a longer term goal. Is future and past oriented, and does not just see immediate issues or problems. Shows evidence of planning in academic and non-academic areas.	Lack of evidence of setting and accomplishing goals. Likely to to proceed without clear direction. Relies on others to determine outcomes. Lives in present. Does not have a "plan" for approaching a course, school in general, an activity, etc. Goals which are stated are vague and unrealistic.
5. AVAILABILITY OF STRONG SUPPORT PERSON	Has identified and received help, support and encouragement from one or more specific individuals. Does not rely solely on his/her own resources to solve problems. It is not a "loner." Willing to admit that he/she needs help when appropriate.	No evidence of turning to others for help. No single support person, mentor, or close advisor can be identified. Does not talk about his/her problems. Feels he/she can handle things on his/her own. Access to previous support person may be reduced or eliminated Is not aware of the importance of a support person.
6. SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE	Has shown evidence of influencing others in academic or non-academic areas. Comfortable providing advice and direction to others. Has served as mediator in disputes or disagreements among colleagues. Comfortable taking action where called for.	No evidence that others turn to him/her for advice or direction. Non-assertive. Does not take initiative. Overly cautious. Avoids controversy. Not well known by peers.
7. DEMONSTRATED COMMUNITY SERVICE	Identified with a group which is cultural, racial and/or geographic. Has specific and long-term relationships in a community. Has been active in community activities over a period of time. Has accomplished specific goals in a community setting.	No involvement in cultural, racial or geographical group or community. Limited activities of any kind. Fringe member of group(s). Engages more in solitary rather than group activities (academic or non-academic).
8. DEMONSTRATED MEDICAL INTERESTS	Knows about a field or area that he/she has not formally studied in school. Has a non-traditional possibly culturally or racially-based view of medicine. Has developed innovative ways to acquire information about a given subject or field.	Appears to know little about fields or areas he/she has not studied in school. No evidence of learning from community or non-academic activities. Traditional in approach to learning. Has not received credit-by-examination for courses. Not aware of credit-by-examination possibilities.

Table 2

CASE ONE

JOE MARTIN

Joe Martin is an Hispanic second year medical student who got through his first year in fine shape and is doing passable work in his second year, but is considering leaving school because he is lonely and unhappy.

Joe's parents were born in Mexico and originally came to this country illegally as migrant workers. Joe was born in the United States and was bilingual in his early years. He was called Jose until his parents moved to the midwest just as he started high school. Joe was bright and was always a good student but he was not comfortable being singled out as a Chicano. So he worked hard at disguising his accent, started calling himself Joe and pronouncing the family name in English rather than in Spanish.

He loved his parents but he avoided having his friends meet them because their English was poor and they were clearly Chicanos.

Joe was smart enough to get a scholarship to a school away from home and took the opportunity to move away from any identification as a Chicano. While this served him fairly well as an undergraduate he was somewhat lonely and felt removed from the other students. His father died while he was in college; he chose not to return for the funeral.

Joe got the opportunity to go to medical school in a state with a large Hispanic population. He did not think about this much and even when he arrived and saw that there were a number of Chicanos enrolled he did not see any immediate problems.

As the first year students got to know one another better Joe sensed that he was not like any of the other students. The Chicano student group was active and provided many academic and non-academic services for the students but he wasn't comfortable really declaring himself a Chicano and joining them.

At the same time he was not comfortable with the anglo students whose families, backgrounds, and interests were much different than his. He stayed to himself and did reasonably well.

However when Joe started his second year, somehow it came out that he was a Chicano and he felt really embarrassed and isolated. He felt that people were laughing at him and did not respect him. He felt so bad about things that he was about to leave medical school under the pretext that he was more interested in graduate school in another field.